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“Who is Le Corbusier?” According to Turkish Architecture

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Abstract: This study is to focus on the relationship between Le Corbusier and Turkish Architecture and the main question of the study is what Le Corbusier means for Turkish architecture. The method chosen in the research is to seek out answer this question over two main axes (architectural education and architectural practice). Besides a general overview in the section where Le Corbusier is examined within Turkey’s architectural education, it was consulted to student opinions and it was mentioned about the topics of master’s and doctorate theses conducted as directly related to Le Corbusier. Within Turkey’s architectural practice, the projects performed by being inspired of him in Turkey were included and these projects were examined in relation with Le Corbusier’s five main principles. The projects examined show that Le Corbusier has become an important guiding spirit in modern Turkish architecture and additionally, the architectural products arising as a conclusion of inspirations are qualified products verifying Turkey’s architectural medium. Besides, there is a sub-section titled as Le Corbusier’s experiences in Turkey in this section. In this section, by showing reference to Le Corbusier’s travels in Turkey and the things engrossed as a result of his travels (with drawings and writings), it is emphasized that the relationship between Le Corbusier and Turkish architecture can be interpreted as a two-way interaction.

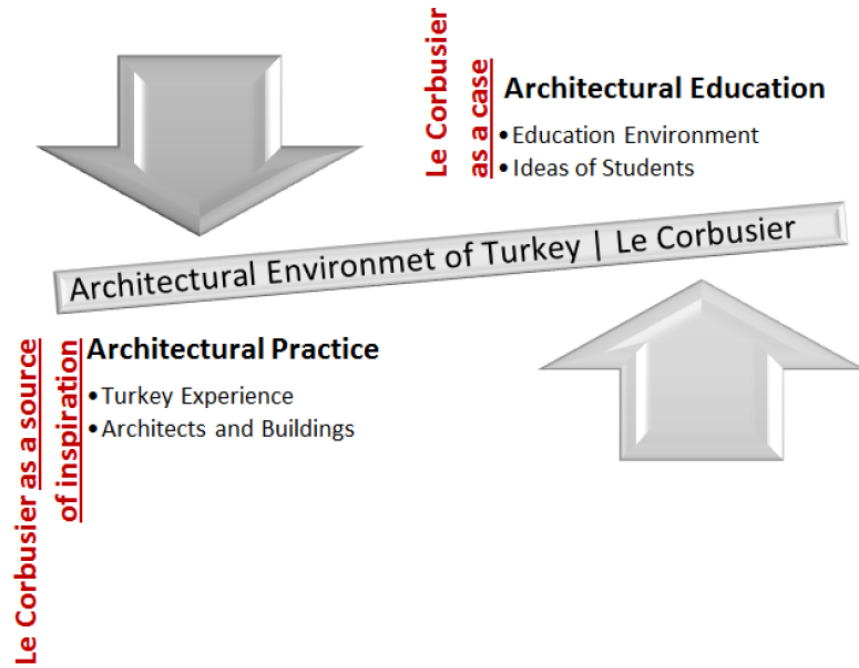
Keywords: Le Corbusier, Turkey, Architecture.

1. Introduction

Who is Le Corbusier? With a little extravagant expression he is one of the most important designers and architects of all times; not only an architect, he has identities of architect, painter, author, architecture philosopher, industrial designer, urban planner, utopist and even public reformist. With this multi-identity structure, Eero Saarinen defines him as the Leonardo da Vinci of our age while Kenzo Tange mixes him up with Michelangelo. Besides, Le Corbusier is the only architect who found the opportunity to design and realize a whole city (Chandigarh) including its public buildings.¹

The question defining the problem area of the study is “What Le Corbusier (who has well known architectural products in almost every country of the world) expressed / is expressing / will express for the architecture environment of Turkey?” While seeking answer to this question, different environments within architecture should be separately handled.

¹ Tanyeli, Uğur “Bir Sağırılar Diyalogu: Le Corbusier’den Türkiye’ye, Türkiye’den Le Corbusier’e” *Sanat Dünyamız*, 87. İstanbul. 2003. pp.111-121.



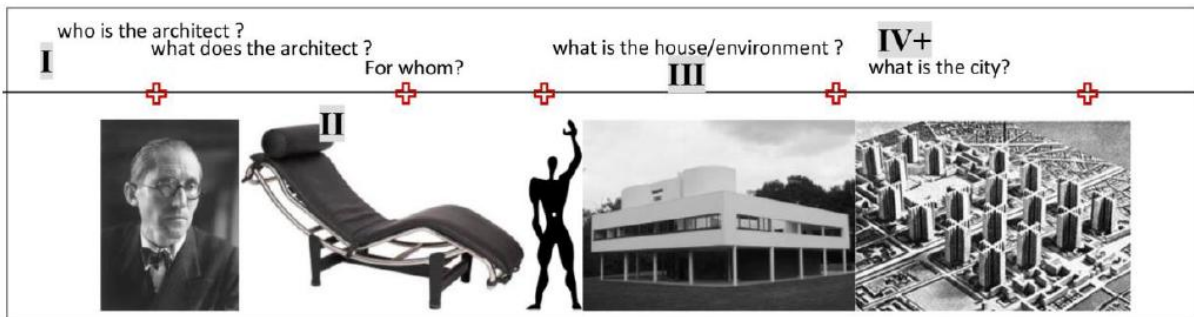
Scheme 1. The method of the survey

For this reason, it was chosen to advance through two main axes in the study. The two mentioned axis (Scheme 1) are architectural education and architectural practice forming the architectural medium. Actually, the answer of the question that “who is Le Corbusier?” can be interpreted differently for these two axes. In this sense, Le Corbusier whose opinions and products are read as an instructive case can be described as a guiding spirit for architectural environment. Within the scope of the architectural education, architectural education and the relationship between architectural practice and Le Corbusier were discussed over their own tools and actors.

2. Le Corbusier in Turkey’s Architectural Education

2.1 Le Corbusier as a Case in Architectural Education

Also for the students of architecture, Le Corbusier is an important figure to whom they encounter from the first days of their education –even long before for some others-. Within architectural education in Turkey, architecture students encounter Corbusier with his different identities in each phase of your education (Scheme 1) and these confrontations are often repeated from the first class to the last during their license education, and then during their master’s and doctoral education.



Scheme 2. The Images of Le Corbusier in Architectural Education

For first-class architecture students, the name of Le Corbusier that comes to their eras from the first days of their education is like the name of a source book to which even the lecturers – who are seen as unachievable in terms of their knowledge and experience of the first days of their education by the students- to be the guides in architecture often consulted. This person is such a person that he is an architect but he is also an artist, designer, writer and philosopher. This multi-identity tells the architecture students about the difficulties of the way they set off on one hand; it reminds the importance of architecture profession where they are candidates on the other hands.

In the first years, Le Corbusier is an important sample given while explaining what is “architect” and “architecture” for architecture students on one hand and he is an important source consulted to while examining the relationship between architecture and human/ human dimensions via “modulor” he developed on the other hand. Architecture students in Turkey encounter with Corbusier repeatedly in terms of different subjects in various courses while their education is advancing following the courses of introduction to the architecture. These confrontations can be experienced in correlation with modernism, housing and even with mobile design. In the courses of urbanism, his designs that can be said revolutionary and even utopic submits an important case while examining the case of the past/now and the future.



1. The samples from the meetings occurred in Turkey about Le Corbusier in recent years and from the books written about him

Above all, the students of Turkish architecture find the opportunity to look through and understand their own architectural inheritance from his window. They discover the traditional housing of Anatolia and the spatial features of İstanbul and Bursa mosques with the words/drawings of this foreign architect. With Le Corbusier seminars and meetings conducted from time to time (Figure 1) and the books written about him in addition to his own writing, they have a chance to recognize him more closely.

The information about master's thesis conducted about Le Corbusier in Turkey (7 master's thesis, 2 doctorate thesis) is seen in Table 1. It was tried to be made visible which these studies focus on in correlation with Le Corbusier through the table. The variety among these subjects refers to the variety of the architect's production on one hand, it indicates to be discussed as a case for many different subjects from the house to the city in the researches conducted in the field of architecture by Corbusier on the other hand. For example; in his thesis,

Yıldırım (2009)² discussed the usage of photography by Le Corbusier as a visual tool. According to Yıldırım, the aim of Le Corbusier's photography usage is to reveal not only recording the work and transferring them to the future, but his own point of view – not only in perspective way but the point of view about architecture- to the spectator. In the thesis conducted by Yılmaz³ in 1993, the formations in Turkey constructed dominantly under the inspiration of Le Corbusier were discussed and the similarities between these buildings and Corbusier's buildings were revealed. Except for this, among the subjects discussed in correlation with Le Corbusier, modern architecture, modulator, modular design, house, city, architectural form and architectural language can be listed.

Table 1.* Thesis on Le Corbusier in Architectural Education in Turkey

Author	Name of the thesis
Y.İSKENDERÖĞLU 2009	An inquiry into the design potentials of Le Corbusier's dom – in o clusters
E. YILDIRIM 2009	P h o t o – s p a c e , photo-story, photo-wall : Architecture of Le Corbusier and its photographic representation
A. KÜÇÜK 2007	The architectural precedent and the diagram: A comparative analysis of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye and Rem Koolhaas' Maison a Bordeaux
C. SEYHUN 2004	The role of the architect and autonomy of architecture: An inquiry into the position of the early modern architect and architecture: Le Corbusier and Maison Curutchet
T. S.TAĞMAT 2004	The maximum architecture can do: Architecture and urbanism from Le Corbusier to Rem Koolhaas
S. ÇINAR 2005	Reading/Unfolding architectural form : An inquiry into the venice hospital project by Le Corbusier
E. GÖRGÜL 2000	An Approach towards the explanation of continuity in architecture in context through analysis of theoretical texts Vitruvius, Alberti and Le corbusier
S. ÇINAR 1999	Reconciliation of the irreconcilable: contradictory language of Le corbusiers architecture
P.YILMAZER 1993	The effects of Le Corbusier on modern Turkish Architecture

* it was collected from www.yok.gov.tr.

2.2 Le Corbusier with the eye of Architecture Students

In this part of the study, the opinions of architecture students about Le Corbusier are seen as a continuation of the previous section. In this context, four graduate students, one of whom are master's student were asked to briefly explain what Le Corbusier means for them and these opinions were transferred here as it is.

Master's student and research assistant E.Yıldızhan *“That Corbusier takes inspiration from the east was good. That architecture leads to the engineering was good. That he took inspiration from the subjects that I had been aware of but I did not persisted on or from the formations that I had seen before surprised me. This situation ensured me to be more skeptical in project analysis during my education life. I like that he could understand and explain complicated subjects with simple sketches and by using plain language. I thought that this can be like this. So, I tried to understand the subjects about the architecture by drawing that I couldn't understand.”*

² Yıldırım, Erdem. *Foto-Mekan, Foto-Hikaye, Foto-Duvar: Le Corbusier Mimarlığı ve Onun Fotografik Temsili*. Director: Açıya Allmer. unpublished master dissertation. Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, İzmir, 2009.

³ Yılmaz, Pınar. *Le Corbusier'nin modern Türk mimarisine etkileri*. Director: Kaya Dinçer. unpublished master dissertation. Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi, İstanbul, 1993.

O.Tekin who is a graduate student describes Le Corbusier like this: *“Le Corbusier is seen as the pioneer of modern architecture in architecture history. With architecture, in the formation of physical substructure of the features like urban planner, furniture designer, writer and sculptor, his being wanderer has a big role. Especially in his travels, he admired the architectural features of the Mediterranean and Central Europe peculiar to themselves and being interpreted of this functional, regional architectural features by him has had great contributions to the formation and development of functional viewpoint. He asserted that the beauty concept arose from the relationship between proportional geometry and the function and he explained the proportional geometry with his modular proportional system again, and he fictionalized the relationship of these anthropometric measures with function in buildings and furniture. Le Corbusier inserted the carrier system into our lives as an architectural element and made the mediums and made the facades free as much as it has not been before, he facilitated them and he denuded the concrete as a sculpture, used the roofs as terrace gardens, and has become a touchstone of conventional architectural implementation of today. Le Corbusier brought a breath of fresh air to the architecture with the opinions he produced and the concepts he revealed and he changed the opinion to the architecture with revolutionist applications”.*

V.Yücel *“Le Corbusier.... It is the name that has pursued me from the first lesson in the Faculty of Architecture until the moment I have been writing this text. “A machine for living”... There are always these words whenever I opened a book. I think one of the important differences of architecture education from the other academic disciplines is that each year and each period we think to know more things but after some time we realize that we know very few through pleasant or unpleasant ways. For this, is one of the names coming first among this awareness. The first they I started to my faculty, I had an awareness about neither Le Corbusier nor the approach he represents. With the inexperience of the first years of architecture, I tried to have an opinion by looking at the photographs of the works. Even I tried to criticize it. I couldn’t understand. I couldn’t understand why they are so important, his aesthetics concept and why everybody mentions about him. While getting learnt the approaches, thoughts and wording slowly, those buildings that had no meaning and even I couldn’t describe aesthetically and that I couldn’t compare the buildings I encountered everyday around me at first have come meaningful for me suddenly. When I turned back, noticing this sharp change in my thoughts about Le Corbusier and my curiosity about him caused him to turn into a passion. According to me, my development in architecture education goes parallel with the change in my point of view about Le Corbusier. I began to buy the books describing him or that he wrote. I was reading the episodes to find the ideal instead of adventure novels. I began to feel that I could reflect the things I learnt from the things I read into all courses I took and every project. Le Corbusier taught me that I shouldn’t remain unanswered questions. These questions were not the questions asked by the juries or my teachers of course. These questions are the ones I asked myself. “Why am I doing this?”, “Is this the most ideal solution?”, “Can’t I find a more logical solution?” ... I’m sure, if I study on a project after years, I will be asking the same questions again and I’m sure one of the most important fellow travellers in the solution of these questions will be Le Corbusier like today.”*

İ.Yıldan *“I learnt the name of Le Corbusier at the first year in the Faculty of Architecture. I have read the books “Towards an Architecture” and “Interview with the Students of Architecture” as all of the architecture students. The connection I have established between the building and the people gave me a new perspective. Besides, that he recorded his travels as sketches and he applied the new things he learnt to his designs encouraged me to see new cities and countries. At the same time examining his thoughts and designs and being aware of the thoughts underlying them ensured me to have a different opinion and to see what I look. Besides I think that the language*

he used in his designs and his approach are timeless and they will have indispensably great contributions to architecture and design history.”

3. Le Corbusier in Turkey’s Architecture Profession Practice

*“His heart stopped on waters of Mediterranean which he adored
A little beyond of his fisher friends and his small home
He will lie facing Mediterranean
They have poured sacred water from Ganges
And soil of Acropolis upon him”
Cengiz Bektaş⁴ (2003)*

The above lines were written by Cengiz Bektaş who is an important Turkish architect. Even only this poem is an indicator of how an important figure is Corbusier in architectural environment both in the world and in Turkey. On the other hand, the relationship between Corbusier who is imitated from his designs to his dressing style and to the thick black-rimmed glasses and who is seen as a source of inspiration with Turkey is interpreted as a two-way interaction by many researches. In other words, the studies showing reference to the travels performed by Corbusier to the cities of Turkey, the things he is recorded within these travels and the things he wrote after his travels defend that Corbusier is significantly affected by Turkish architecture. Aside from these interpretations, it can be easily said that the generic structure of “Turkish house” has actually similar features with the main principles of Corbusier architecture.

3.1 Corbusier as a Source of Inspiration

Surely as in many parts of the world and probably to be in the future, Le Corbusier has become an important source of inspiration for Turkey. This part of the study aims to make this visible over building samples. But beforehand, it is required to repeat the question: “who is Corbusier for the architects in Turkey? Why has Corbusier turned into a source and a role model whose opinions it is consulted to? Besides his intellectual artist personality, his mastery of the architecture, drawing and building, his revolutionist opinions and the clarity in sharing their opinions, Turkish architect can find something from themselves. The matter/discussion that Corbusier is affected by Turkish architecture or Turkish architects are affected by him actually points out some partners in both sides. The most important one of these partnerships is a construction mass developing as a reflection from inside-out/of the inside to out. Bektaş expresses as inside-outside matching as an important features of tradition Turkish architecture. Similarly, there is an important part titled “A plan develops from inside to outside” in Towards a New Architecture that is known as Corbusier. On the other hand, the attitude similar to Corbu architecture broking up the structure from the ground with pilotis raises the main spaces of the houses with wooden columns and it is seen in Turkish houses that are placed at the first floor. In also Turkish houses, big windows in Turkish houses just like in Sovaye ensure to be taken of plenty of sunlight into the interior space.

Adolf Max Vogt (1996)⁵ examined the effects of Turkish House on modern thinking and modern architecture and revealed with a detailed comparison. Vogt attracts attention that the principle that at least three of five principles revealed by Corbusier are independent from rising of the building on pilotis, the idea of horizontal window and being independent of external structure of the outer shell from the carriers can be found in Turkish
















⁴ Bektaş, Cengiz “Le Corbusier”. *Sanat Dünyamız*, 87. İstanbul. 2003. pp.201-203.

⁵ Vogt, Alexander Max. *Le Corbusier, the Noble Savage: Toward an Archaeology of Modernism*. 1996.

houses (Vogt, 1996). Despite having classical styles, Schwob House that Le Corbusier interpreted wooden elements with concrete elements in Ottoman structures is named as “Turkish house” and it carries traces from İstanbul.⁶

On the other hand, as it is mentioned before, Le Corbusier affected many Turkish architect and his works have become the source of inspiration for the designs of their designs. In this part of the study, these inspirations were revealed in correlation with five principles embodied by Le Corbusier in his sample of Villa Savoye through a table (Table 2). The samples discussed here is building block in Hukukçular Site (H. Baysal, M. Birsal/İstanbul), Büyükkada Anatolian Club Hotel (T. Cansever, A. Hancı/İstanbul Büyükkada) and Cinnah 19 (N.Ersin/Ankara). Each of three buildings is regarded among the main samples of Modern Turkish Architecture with original approaches of his era.

Table 2. Three cases from Turkey that design under the influence of Le Corbusier

	Hukukçular Housing Blocks, 1958-67, Hakkı Baysal, Melih Birsal	Büyükkada Anatolian Club Hotel, Turgut Cansever, Abdurrahman Hancı, 1953	Cinnah 19, 1958, Nejat Ersin
pilotis			
roof gardens			
free facade			
horizontal windows			
free plan			

⁶ Cohen, Jean Louis. *Le Corbusier*. Bonn: Taschen, 2006.

For example; it is possible to follow the effects from Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles by Le Corbusier in Hukukçular Site conducted in İstanbul in 50s. The building rising from the ground with pilotis can be said to display Corbusien architecture in terms of both roof usage and planning understanding. But to use simplex, duplex and half-duplex plan types separate Hukukçular Site from the structure of Unité d'Habitation including only duplex plan solution. Different solutions in the plan can also be read from the aspect of the structure, that is to say it is a continuation for the exterior. The structure including 66 houses on 12 floors was programmed in a style to include site life conditions within it. Commercial activities were designed on the ground and clerestories and the spaces with social usage were designed on the roof.

Anadolu Club Hotel designed by Abdurrahman Hancı and Turgut Cansever exists with reference to a building that is a source of inspiration to him and to a typology (Le Corbusier-Swiss Pavilion). The architects clearly explain that they inspired in the design of this hotel that is among the youth products from Swiss Dormitory Building designed by Le Corbusier in 1925 and from its canonical feature. However, it cannot be mentioned only about a formal transfer here. The power to exceed by criticizing the cultural references hosted by the building and the building they inspired makes him powerful.⁷ In the first period works of Cansever, it is possible to see Corbusien attitude especially in the first period works, but he displayed an original interpretation by blending the things he learnt from Corbusier with the information of Anatolian culture.

In the building design process of Cinnah 19 by Ersin, besides Unité d'Habitation block of Le Corbusier in Marseilles, he was affected by Lucio Costa, Oscar Niemeyer and Edward Durrell Stone. However, as in the other samples, Cinnah 19 also was described not as a simple “imitation” of the international trainings dominant in the building but as the product of an “internalized modernism” in a convincing manner.⁸ In this building, three of five elements of Le Corbusier (pilotis, free aspect, free facade, horizontal window and roof garden) were applied.⁹

The samples listed above are shown among the most important works of Modern Turkish Architecture. However, modern attitude in these buildings meeting the modern view of the west affects with local features affected Turkey's architectural environment in further periods. That's to say, the effect of Corbusier to Turkey's architectural environment did not limited only to its own architectural products and saying, but the ones who are in the struggling of understanding and interpreting him displayed architectures to guide the successors.

⁷ Özorhon, İlker Fatih. *Mimarlıkta Özgünlük Arayışları:1950–60 Arası Türkiye Modernliği*. Director: Türkan Uluşu Uraz. unpublished PhDdissertation. İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi, İstanbul, 2008.

⁸ Cengizkan, Ali: “Cinnah 19: ütöpik mi Gerçek modern mi?”, *Modernin Saati, Boyut Yayıncılık*, İstanbul, 2002.

⁹ Özorhon, İlker Fatih. *Mimarlıkta Özgünlük Arayışları:1950–60 Arası Türkiye Modernliği*. Director: Türkan Uluşu Uraz. unpublished PhDdissertation. İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi, İstanbul, 2008.

3.2 Le Corbusier's Experience in Turkey



3. Le Corbusier Sketch Turkish Houses; 4. Typic Turkish House

According to some researches conducted important researches about Corbusier, his visit to Turkey and that he examined Turkish houses during this travel affected his architecture to a great extent. For example, Kortan (1992)¹⁰ explained this situation as; *“Le Corbusier revealed the traditional values existing in Turkish houses with an extraordinary observation skill and submitted some of them as the principles of Modern Architecture. The general principles he found in a Turkish house are these: spaciousness, airiness and brightness were forefront in the houses and in order to provide them, wide and plenty of windows were used: so, plenty of sunlight entered into the houses at the same time and the rooms opened to the landscape. The houses were made in the system of wooden skeleton and they have a light vision. Thanks to this, it was possible to make maximum visible-glasses surfaces. Turkish people separate the ground floor into secondary functions as entrance, garage and cellar and they organize the main spaces of the houses on the first floor built on wooden columns”*. According to Kortan, Le Corbusier saw many principles like this in a Turkish house and starting from here he suggested five principles that have an important place in modern architecture. The geniuses like him took a lesson from the history of architecture and by being concluded some principles deductively from him, they used them to create a “timeless architecture”, “an architecture that is valid and valuable all the times”.

However all researches do not share this point of view. However, the most important stubborn fact in this interaction is that Le Corbusier analyzed Turkish architecture and spaces very correctly in conclusion of his travels and even he comprehended and transferred them better than Turkish people. Within this scope, his interpretations about Yeşil Mosque in Bursa are as if he were giving an architectural lesson and they are noteworthy. *“A building is like a soap bubble. This bubble is perfect and harmonious if the breath has been evenly distributed and regulated from the inside. The exterior is a result of an interior. In Bursa in Asia Minor, at the Green Mosque, you enter by little doorway of normal human height; a quite small vestibule produces in you the necessary change of scale so that you may appreciate, as against the dimensions with which it is intended to impress you. Then you can feel the noble size of the Mosque and your eyes can take its measure. You are in a great white marble space filled with light. Beyond you can see a second similar space of the same dimensions but it half-light and raised on several steps (repetition in a minor key); on each side a still smaller space in subdued light-turning round, you have two very small space in shade. From full light to shade, a rythm. Tiny doors and enormous bays. You are captured, you have lost the common scale...”*¹¹

¹⁰ Kortan, Enis: “Çağdaş Türk Evinde Geleneksel Değerlerin Yorumu”. *Yapı Dergisi*, 130. İstanbul. 1992. pp. 45-50.

¹¹ Le Corbusier. *Towards a New Architecture*, The Architectural Press, London, 1927/1972.

Or, Corbusier who emphasized the beauty of pure geometric forms interpreted Turkish mosques in formal term; “An elementary geometry orders these masses: the square, the cube, the sphere. In plan it is a rectangular complex with a single axes. The orientation of the axis of every mosque on Moslem soil toward the black stone of the Kaaba is an aweinspiring symbol of the unity of the faith.”¹² These lines are like a mirror transferred from a couple of eyes looking from outside to writing and reflecting his own architectural history around the world with repeated and powerful sensitivity.

4. Conclusion

Tanyeli¹³ asks “How is life after death of an architect?” and relates the reality assuring that architect continues living after death to the fact that the architect should convert to a role model and the architectural properties that he defined should shape as his public personality after his death. And according to Tanyeli, this came to reality in Corbusier case and he became a role model for architecture world who still continues to be effective. Le Corbusier who is positioned in a separate place from his contemporaries with his act of always taking new steps and trying to produce new solutions, is a pacemaker figure in Turkey books of whom are still read, buildings of whom are observed and copied.

Le Corbusier is an important source whose opinions and projects the architecture students can apply to in many subjects. He is a part of their first education about the subjects who the architect is, where he is located as a social figure, what the architecture profession is and what it serves or does not serve as an intellectual profession man at the beginning of their education. Le Corbusier is a model shown as a sample by architecture educators in Turkey with his many designs and especially the production of original architecture he conducted as a result of a continuous questioning. The first analysis work of the students is conducted on his buildings and the researches/thesis and publications are conducted about him. The foreign travels of an architecture school, student or a young architect are formed in a way that can see his buildings.

Le Corbusier was followed for architecture production in Turkey especially after 1950s, his innovative approaches was accepted and repeated by the architects and he has become the source of inspiration of many buildings shown as qualified architectural products within Turkish architecture today. The buildings mentioned within the scope of the study, can be evaluated within this scope. The travels he made to Turkey, his observations and evaluations during these travels are extremely important. For example according to Cansever¹⁴ (2003), nobody has made the evaluation of Istanbul conducted by Le Corbusier in 1912 when he was only 25 years old. With this feature, Le Corbusier is also separated from the other architects of his age. Although the relationship between Le Corbusier and Turkish architecture is mostly interpreted as a one-way relationship, we think that this explains a two-way interaction. The second aspect of this interaction can be explained with the travels he conducted in Turkey. It can be concluded from his own words that some features of Turkish cities, mosques and houses affected him to a great extent.

¹² Le Corbusier. *Le Voyage d'Orient*, Les Editions Forces Vives, MGB a Meaux, 1966, pp.78.

¹³ Tanyeli, Uğur “Bir Sağırklar Diyalogu: Le Corbusier'den Türkiye'ye, Türkiye'den Le Corbusier'e” *Sanat Dünyamız*, 87. İstanbul. 2003. pp.111-121.

¹⁴ Cansever, Turgut “Le Corbusier Hala Güncel mi?”. *Sanat Dünyamız*, 87. İstanbul. 2003. pp.100.

On the other hand, the ones fed/inspired by the opinions and products of Le Corbusier through their opinions and products submitted some work enriching and developing Turkey's architecture environment with the architecture they formed. Within the scope of this study, Hukukçular Housing Block, Anadolu Club Hotel Building and Cinnah 19 are only three of these samples listed f. In this sense, Le Corbusier can be seen as a door opening to the modern world and the architecture of this world in Turkey's architecture environment. Especially after 1930s, making what he has made and design and more importantly to think/question like him is like a way to reach the modern one.

Turkey located between Europe and Asia has a young population who are modern or in a struggle of being modern. In the field of architecture, as a figure standing beside the word of modern Le Corbusier will indispensably continue to be a reference guide with his opinions and works in Turkey's Architecture environment.

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